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ABSTRACT

A study examined the interactions between special education and mainstream early childhood teachers and children with and without disabilities in integrated (mainstreamed) preschool settings. It was hypothesized that in an integrated setting, special education teachers would be more likely to interact with handicapped children while mainstream teachers would more likely interact with regular children, and that rates and intensity of interaction would differ between teacher types. It was also hypothesized that the presence or absence of the full-support special education teacher would have a significant effect on mainstream teacher interactions with special needs children. The methodology involved cross-type observations and analysis of interaction rates, intensity, and content. Results showed a very low interaction rate overall and significant differences between special and mainstream teacher interaction patterns. The study also set out to identify the types of attitudes teachers held toward integration and to establish whether a relationship existed between these attitudes and the observed behavior. The results showed a generally positive attitude toward integration. (WP)

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TEACHER BEHAVIOUR AND ATTITUDES AS KEY FACTORS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD INTEGRATION

Jean B. Jenkin Nov. 1991

The Early Childhood Integration Project, which is the focus of this report, was established in three Victorian kindergartens following publication of the Victorian Review of Integration. This study undertook to examine interactions between special and mainstream early childhood teachers and children with and without disabilities in pre-school settings. The methodology employed involved cross-type observations and analysis of interaction rates, intensity and content. Results showed a very low interaction rate overall and significant differences between special and mainstream teacher interaction patterns. This was despite a generally positive attitude towards integration as measured on a validated instrument.

Differential educational philosophies, intent and purposes are discussed as factors influencing successful integration at this level.

The Early Childhood Integration Project seems ideally suited to examination as an example of current innovative practices in the field of special education.

This study is concerned with two strains of education - the education of the very young and the education of the very handicapped. Although there have always been places for pre-school age children with some learning deviances in local kindergartens, the presence of what were considered to be handicapped children has not been usual. Until the recent innovation of the concept of "early intervention" in special education many handicapped children remained at home without the benefit of therapeutic or educational resources, until they reached an arbitrary age at which they could be inducted into a Day Training Centre or similar institution. Often these schools were established and maintained by concerned parents as heated debates raged as to where the moral and financial responsibility lay for educating such children.

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The recently published Ministerial Review (Victoria, 1984) had as its fundamental philosophy a belief that state education facilities must serve all children equally and emphasises non-categorisation in the provision of services. Whilst this is a noble aim, care must be taken that such an homo-geneous system does not lead to a denial of basic non-educational needs provision.

The Ministerial Review (rec 6.11, p.142) recommends that:

"The Minister for Education shall have responsibility to provide education services for the education of children with impairments and disabilities from the time of diagnosis..."

and the logical implication of this statement is that where provision of services for children was at that time only the responsibility of the Education Department from the legal school age of five years, henceforth it should assume responsibility for educational services below this age (i.e. for children diagnosed at birth or during infancy as having a disability)

Integration programmes are established essentially in the belief that handicapped children will benefit through interaction with non-handicapped children (Meisels, 1978; Karnes & Less, 1979; Dickerson & Davis, 1981; Levine & Coloum, 1983). Indeed, integration policy in Victoria is based on the premise that the practice will "contribute to equal educational out-comes" (Ministerial Review, 1984) for handicapped children. Further, "implied in all advocacy of integration is the assumption that the non-handicapped child will not be adversely affected" (Peck & Cooke, 1983). Positive outcomes, then, are anticipated.

The question of the educational efficacy of integration has not been adequately addressed in the literature so far. A meta-analysis of 50 studies involving 27,000 special and mainstream children in integration programmes (Carlberg & Kavale,

1980), found no conclusive evidence of the superiority of the integrated model. Peck & Cooke (1983) also point out that the concept of integration has been "based on primarily ideological... and later legalistic arguments rather than sound empirical demonstrations" of their worth.

Although the concept of integrating young children may be simply defined as mixing handicapped and non-handicapped in the same setting, there is in fact an array of complex arrangements possible for undertaking the task. Odom & Speltz (1983) describe programmes containing a majority of non-handicapped children as "mainstreamed", whilst programmes with a majority of handicapped children are labelled "integrated".

Apart from population ratios in integrated programmes, various approaches and mechanisms for attaining results are described. Odom & Speltz (1983) refer to "the extent to which procedural variables can substantially affect outcomes", and it is suggested that teacher attitudes may influence their choices of procedure and curriculum and that these in turn are reflected in outcomes. Dickerson & Davis (1981) suggest that the "developmental approach" is best as it involves the teachers in selecting educational opportunities "appropriate in content and adapted to the child's mode of learning". Levine & Coloum (1983) describe the influence of peer play and toys as significant in integration programmes. Guralnick (1981) has identified 13 common procedural variables "that may affect child behaviour in integrated pre-school settings", including teacher/child ratios, teacher-training and curricular choices. The teacher component is seen as having a substantial influence in many aspects of the integration strategy and teacher/child interactions are seen as significant.

Fundamentally, the handicapped children were being integrated into the kindergartens with the full support of special teachers. The responsibility of the special teachers,

therefore, was to support and assist the designated handicapped children at each setting.

The kindergarten teacher, however, was responsible for all enrollees and despite the special teacher's support, needed to consider the handicapped children when she was devising programmes. This extra responsibility may affect - or conversely, be affected by - her attitudes and self-confidence (Hannah & Pliner, 1983). It is her responsibility, in consultation with the special teacher, to facilitate integration by providing viable activity options which were within the range of ability of both types of child. Fortunately, professional kindergarten teachers are trained to allow for a broad range of abilities, and integration at this level has the greatest opportunity for success.

Teacher Attitudes and Integration

Integration is often seen as having a positive effect on the attitudes of those involved (Guralnick, 1981; Stainback & Stainback, 1982; Harasymiw & Horne 1976). Conversely it has been observed (Gargiulo & Yonker, 1983) that successful integration often depends upon the educator's attitude, and further than "attitude may be more important than any administrative or curricular scheme". Guralnick (1976) forecast positive attitudinal change as a result of integration, and Ispa & Matz (1978) projected a growth in social awareness and tolerance among non-handicapped children in such programmes.

Shotel, Iano & McGettigan (1972) compared the attitudes of regular teachers who were involved either in integration programmes with resource room support, or in self-contained (segregated) special education classes. They found that the initially expressed positive attitudes of the integration teachers reduced over time and with involvement in the integration programme. Also, both the integration and mainstream

teachers overwhelmingly felt (99%+) that special skills and materials were necessary to teach handicapped children.

Garguilo & Yonker (1983) report that "pre- and in-service teachers generally have manifested negative and stereotyped attitudes towards handicapped learners", and this has been reported elsewhere (Moore & Fine, 1978). However, Stephens & Braun (1980) report an increase in the willingness of teachers to integrate handicapped children "as the number of special education courses completed increased". Hannah & Pliner (1983) believe that "structured contacts" along with information may minimise negative interactions and attitudes.

Integration of handicapped children into local kindergartens was an innovation in educational thought and process in Victoria. Implementation of innovations, whether in the educational or other fields, is seen as a social process since innovative ideas are accepted or rejected after a process of modification and adaptation involving all participants (Hamayer, 1982). Difficulties in innovation implementation may arise if the capacity of adults to "re-organise their ways of thinking and professional behaviour" is not taken into account (*ibid*). Fullen (1972) also suggests that the influence of the "users" of innovations (in this case the teachers) on the decision to implement the strategy (in this case, integration) needs to be felt to be significant if the innovation is to gain acceptance.

Finally, in addition to philosophical and educational justification, the project itself was seen as justified as a consequence of current demographic data relating to the provision of pre-schools. In the Moorabbin district as one of the three regions with a declining population, the Southern Region had one of the smallest school-age populations (0-14 year olds). The Region had a declining population in the family-forming 15 to 50 year old age group and because of these statistics, the population of the region was quite reasonably expected to continue to decline in coming years.

This had obvious implications for local kindergartens as demand for places would fall and under-usage of facilities could be predicted. It should be noted that although specific provision of places is not made for handicapped children in local kindergartens, they are not deducted from population statistics when assessments of need for the establishment of pre-schools is made.

It was hypothesised that in an integrated setting:

special teachers would be more likely to interact with handicapped children and mainstream teacher with regular children, and that rates and intensity of interaction would differ for both teacher types. It was also hypothesised that the presence or absence of the full-support special teacher would have a significant effect on mainstream teacher interactions with special children.

Teacher Interactions

Issues identified in recent literature which related directly to teacher/child interactions formed the basis for hypotheses. These issues included proportion of handicapped children, division of responsibility for special and mainstream teachers, and consequence differences in the integration models undertaken.

As these hypotheses were all supported by the findings, the following general statements may be made:

- i) teachers in this study were most likely to interact with children of their own type;

- ii) that rates of interaction differed significantly in that special teachers interacted more frequently, with a greater variety of behaviours and for a greater proportion of the time;
 - iii) that neither type of teacher, however, interacted for a significant proportion of the observed time with either type of child;
- and, importantly,
- iv) that mainstream teachers interacted significantly more frequently with handicapped children when the special teacher was not present.

	HANDICAPPED CHILDREN	MAINSTREAM CHILDREN
SPECIAL TEACHER	15.75%	1%
MAINSTREAM TEACHER	2.6%	5%

TABLE 4.1 - % OF ALL OBSERVATIONS DURING WHICH AN INTERACTION TOOK PLACE
BETWEEN OBSERVED CHILDREN AND TEACHERS

The latter finding may indicate that the continuous presence of the special teacher, and the apparent strict division of responsibilities with regard to programming, were the factor inhibiting the interpersonal interactions which should form the basis of the integration programme. Fundamental to this division was the fact that two different philosophies governed implementation of the programme.

		KINDERGARTEN 1		KINDERGARTEN 2		KINDERGARTEN 3	
		SPECIAL CHILDREN	M'STEAM CHILDREN	SPECIAL CHILDREN	M'STEAM CHILDREN	SPECIAL CHILDREN	M'STEAM CHILDREN
SPECIAL TEACHER	501	6.5	0			15.0	4.0
SPECIAL TEACHER	502	10.0	0	15.0	1.0		
MAINSTREAM TEACHER	401	2.0	6.0				
MAINSTREAM TEACHER	402			3.0	3.5		
MAINSTREAM TEACHER	403					3.0	3.5

TABLE 4.2 % OF ALL OBSERVATIONS DURING WHICH AN INTERACTION TOOK PLACE BETWEEN OBSERVED CHILD AND SPECIAL AND MAINSTREAM TEACHERS AT EACH KINDERGARTEN

- * Kindergarten 1: No interactions between special teachers and mainstream children were recorded during observation sessions; the mainstream teacher interacted with mainstream children three times as often as she did with handicapped children.
- * Kindergarten 2: The special teacher interacted 15 times more often with handicapped children than with mainstream children; the mainstream teacher interacted almost as often with handicapped children as she did with mainstream children.
- * Kindergarten 3: The special teacher interacted almost four times as often with handicapped children as she did with mainstream children, whilst the mainstream teacher interacted almost as often with handicapped children as she did with mainstream children.

Different Philosophies

Special and mainstream teachers need to employ different educational strategies to achieve the common goal of maximising pupil development and progress. The diversity in approach was appropriate given the comparative abilities of the children involved. However, it was the reconciliation of the two almost opposing techniques in the one setting which posed the greatest difficulty for staff.

On one hand, the special teacher felt it necessary to employ intensive intervention strategies in order to build up a hierarchy of skills over time for each child. She was aware that maintaining motivation in young handicapped children required the consistent application of reinforcement. She was also aware that the child was more likely to be reinforced by the teacher herself than by the activity, so her approach was to work closely with the child on a one-to-one basis whenever possible.

This compared with the basic kindergarten philosophy of non-interference with the child's emerging intellectual curiosity and the strategy consequent upon this of providing a stimulating environment full of variety and opportunities for experimentation. The kindergarten teacher assumed the less obtrusive, though no less dynamic, role of facilitator relying on the child's inherent self-motivating forces such as the need to conform and need for personal achievement.

The latter approach is more likely to be successful with non-handicapped pre-schoolers as the child usually has a base of knowledge, skills and experience which can be built on. The special educator on the other hand may well be working with a child having few, if any, social or cognitive skills.

It would seem therefore, that if there is no genuine integration of purpose, approach, personnel or activities, what may emerge is a situation in which two separate, parallel

programmes are conducted in one setting. This is no better or worse than already exists in segregated settings. Again it must be emphasised that the full-support integration model may be interpreted in a variety of ways. The findings of this study clearly indicated that interactions between teachers and their own type of child, though unlikely to occur often, were more varied and frequent than interactions across types, and that there was some reluctance on the part of teachers to cross boundaries of responsibility by interacting with children of the opposite type.

Teacher Attitudes

The study set out to identify the types of attitudes teachers held towards integration and to establish whether a relationship existed between these attitudes and the observed behaviour.

	TEACHER CODE	POSITIVE ATTITUDE	NEGATIVE ATTITUDE	UNDECIDED
SPECIAL	501	42.8	27.4	29.80
	502	70.15	23.5	6.4
MAINSTREAM	401	70.15	11.75	18.10
	402	67.8	17.25	14.95

TABLE 4.13 - % OF EXPRESSED ATTITUDE POSITIVE TO INTEGRATION AND NEGATIVE
TO INTEGRATION FOR EACH TEACHER

The results showed a positive attitude of between 67% and 70% for three of the teachers, with a surprisingly ambivalent attitude score of 42% positive and 30% undecided for one special teacher. It may be that this particular teacher's experience and training in early intervention produced some misgivings about the effectiveness of this programme. It was reported in the results also, that the dissenting vote in most

issues examined in the attitude scale was given by this teacher, and therefore some urgent discussions may be indicated to re-establish her confidence in the programme.

Despite the low interaction rate, and therefore one could argue, the low exposure rate of mainstream teachers to handicapped children in this programme, their positive attitude towards integration is a vital issue. The kindergartens in this project elected voluntarily to participate and the programme is viewed as innovative and unusual for the region. The teachers have placed themselves under scrutiny and may have misgivings about the procedure. The A.T.M.S. scale could have identified specific areas of concern such as increased demands on their time or their own ability to deal with special needs. Further follow-up measures are indicated to determine new developments in attitude after long term exposure to integration.

A Major issue in the integration debate has always been the increased demands on the time, attention and skills of mainstream teachers. The full-support model undertaken here, seems to quell that concern, as three of the four teachers felt that they were not unduly pressured with regard to time demands. In addition, the results indicated that all the teachers felt that a mainstream programme contained many of the elements appropriate for a handicapped child's programme, and further that significant changes to classroom procedures were unnecessary. All of these results are consistent with the way in which the programme is conducted and it is difficult to establish whether attitudes have prescribed the procedure or vice versa. It may be stated, therefore, that a relationship seems to exist between expressed attitudes and overt behaviours in this programme.

Some caution in the interpretation of the result must be exercised, however. The analysis presented here suggests that what is being undertaken may not be considered an integration programme in the sense explored in the A.T.M.S. Scale, since the full-support model is not acknowledged in that study. It may also indicate, however, that

many of the concerns expressed about integration at this level, could be overcome given the presence of full-time support personnel in more programmes. This strategy may deserve more serious consideration in future planning.

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